

Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

Progress in Accomplishing Strategies and Goals

This attachment of the State Plan provides a summary of accomplishments in completing the Strategies and Goals as identified in the previous state plan submission, Attachments 4.12(c)(1) and 4.12(d). The following is a summary of the:

- ✓ goals achieved;
- ✓ strategies that contributed to achieving the goals; and
- ✓ an explanation of the factors that impeded the achievement of goals.

Goal 1: Improve earnings, benefits and career advancement for consumers served by SBVI.

The average annual wage for individuals rehabilitated during FFY 2007 was \$17,027 with an average hourly rate of \$9.79 an hour. A renewed emphasis has been put on assisting consumers to obtain quality occupations whenever possible. Strategies that contributed to the high level of wages reported by SBVI included:

- ✓ The Division's continuing emphasis on promoting higher wages for consumers.
- ✓ Providing financial incentives to providers who help consumers receive higher wages.
- ✓ District offices working closely with local economic development to access potential employers.
- ✓ Acknowledgement of staff whose average hourly wage of successful closures was exemplary.
- ✓ A focus on obtaining full time employment with benefits for individuals who are on SSI or SSDI.
- ✓ Continued collaboration with other partners to provide ongoing support services to individuals with most significant disabilities who required supported employment.

Goal 2: Create a partnership between SBVI and the local business community.

Division staff participate in organizations representing local business and industry in communities around the state. In addition, all SBVI staff participate in a variety of activities to promote partnerships between vocational rehabilitation and employers in their communities. Examples of activities during the past year include:

- ✓ Information Dissemination at the State Optometric Association

Convention

- ✓ Presentations to Local Service Organizations (i.e. Lion's Clubs, Masons, Kiwanis)
- ✓ Outreach activities in conjunction with National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October
- ✓ Participation in Employer Recognition Activities
- ✓ Local Workforce Development Committees
- ✓ Chamber of Commerce Committees
- ✓ Job Fairs
- ✓ Health Fairs
- ✓ Employer Forums
- ✓ Local Mayor's Committees

Goal 3: Provide Individuals with blindness or visual impairments who have severe and persistent mental illness, traumatic brain injuries, and significant multiple disabilities specialized services so they can fully access the benefits of vocational rehabilitation services.

Due to the issues to be addressed when coordinating and delivering services for individuals who are blind with a traumatic brain injury, specialized training continues to be provided. This specialized training assists staff in addressing not only sensory deficits but cognitive training needs of those served.

Services for individuals with dual sensory loss (deaf/blindness) are accessed through cooperation of the University of SD Center for Disabilities, CSD, and other entities serving individuals with dual sensory loss. The expertise of the Deaf/Blind Specialist allows consumers of SBVI with dual sensory loss the opportunity to receive specialized services that assist them to become employed and live independently. The deaf-blind specialist serves as a consultant to address issues with SBVI staff and meets with consumers as needed. CSD provides training and services specifically related to hearing loss.

Specialists in the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired provide unique services not available elsewhere in the state. A diabetic education specialist provides training in non-sighted techniques for diabetes management for individuals who cannot utilize traditional techniques due to vision loss. The low vision specialist provides evaluation and training to individuals with residual vision in both the independent living and vocational programs. Job site analysis conducted by the low vision

specialist assists consumers and employers with accommodations on the job. A certified orientation and mobility specialist provides evaluation and training in mobility techniques. The services delivered by SBVI specialists are critical for assuring successful outcomes for individuals with multiple disabilities.

In cooperation with the Divisions of Mental Health and Rehabilitation Services, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired has made significant progress in accessing methods to better serve individuals with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). Performance contracts with mental health centers promote the use of supported employment services, supported educational services and transitional employment. This has lead to a team approach between local offices and the mental health centers leading to coordinated long-term supports allowing individuals to have greater access to vocational rehabilitation services.

Goal 4: Implement strategies that will assist consumers to make informed choices and decisions about their vocational future.

Initiatives have been implemented to prepare and guide students with disabilities who choose to attend post-secondary education programs. The Division has participated in initiatives of the Transition Liaison Project such as “Youth Leadership Forum” and “Catch the Wave”. These programs offer information, resources and support to assist consumers in making good decisions about their vocational futures.

The Division is continually seeking new methods of assisting consumers in making informed decisions in relation to their vocational services and goals. Division programs and services are found on the SBVI Home Page. Consumers and agencies are accessing this web-based resource on a regular basis. A consumer information packet assists consumers with information on resources available to them and includes provider choices, descriptions of services, information on consumer organizations and other information relevant to making informed choices throughout the rehabilitation process.

A cooperative agreement between the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division supports a transition specialist who works with transition aged students with vision loss. The transition specialist meets with students and IEP teams on a state wide basis to assist with planning for post secondary and vocational transition.

Transition services are also provided to high school students through week long training and career exploration activities at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind each summer. Activities include tours of businesses and post secondary institutions, employer interviews, skills of blindness training, a business leadership luncheon, and recreational activities for students with vision loss from across South Dakota.

Goal 5: The Division will meet the Standards and Performance Indicators established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

In accordance with the provisions of the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the Division monitors program standards to ensure compliance with federal standards and quality of services.

Standard 1: Employment Outcomes

Standard 1 requires an agency to assist eligible individuals with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, to obtain, maintain, or regain high quality employment outcomes. The quality of an employment outcome is based on whether the outcome is consistent with the individual's vocational choices; is in competitive, self-employment, or BEP employment; maintains or increases the individual's earnings; and offers medical insurance plans covering hospitalization. The following performance indicators measure minimum compliance with this standard.

- 1.1 Compare the total numbers of individuals obtaining an employment outcome during the current and previous performance periods.
- 1.2 Measure the number of persons obtaining an employment outcome as a percentage of all persons exiting the program after receiving VR services.
- 1.3 Measure the number of persons obtaining a competitive, self-employment, or BEP employment outcome as a percentage of all persons obtaining any type of employment outcome.
Primary Indicator
- 1.4 Measure the percentage of competitively employed individuals who have significant disabilities. **Primary Indicator**
- 1.5 Measure the average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-employment, or BEP employment

with earning levels equivalent to at least the minimum wage as a ratio to the State's average hourly earnings for all individuals in the State who are employed. **Primary Indicator**

- 1.6 Measure the difference between the percentage of individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-employment, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage who report their own income as their largest single source of economic support and the percentage of individuals in that employment who reported their own income as their largest single source of support at the time they applied for VR services.

Standard 2: Equal Access to Services

Standard 2 requires an agency to measure equality of access to rehabilitation services. Fewer than 100 individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds exited SBVI's program in FFY 2007. Statistical reliability is not possible with the limited numbers exiting the system. In accordance with 34 CFR 361.84 (C)(2)(iii), the agency's policies ensuring equal access for all individuals with disabilities assure equal access to services for individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds.

Assessment of the State VR Agency in meeting the Performance Standards and Indicators

Utilizing the FFY 2007 data, the Division has assessed their performance in meeting the minimum requirements for Standard 1. The following chart displays the outcome of this assessment.

Standard/Indicator	Minimum Requirement	SBVI Outcomes	Indicator Met?
Standard 1: Employment Outcomes	4 of the 6 Indicators and 2 of the 3 Primary Indicators	6 of the 6 Indicators and all 3 Primary Indicators	Yes
Indicator 1.1	91	100	Yes
Indicator 1.2	69.8%	73.53%	Yes
Indicator 1.3	35.4%	100%	Yes
Indicator 1.4	89%	97.96%	Yes
Indicator 1.5	\$8.76	\$9.65	Yes
Indicator 1.6	30.4%	38.78%	Yes

The following chart gives a historical view of outcomes in SBVI including percentage of competitive employment outcomes.

FFY	% Competitive Employment	Successful Closures
1997	89%	81
1998	90%	86
1999	90%	101
2000	96%	92
2001	98%	90
2002	93%	74
2003	94%	65
2004	95%	76
2005	97%	87
2006	93%	96
2007	98%	100

Goal 6: The Division will continue to review its processes and policies and will develop methods to improve efficiencies in the delivery of services to consumers.

During FFY 2007, no program guides were developed.

Procedures, guidance, and efficiencies were provided to SBVI staff over the past year. Topics included:

- South Dakota Rehabilitation Center referral procedures
- The Medical Assistance For Workers with Disabilities Program
- The Ticket to Work Program
- Determining VR participation in post-secondary costs
- Proper use of trial work in determining the potential benefit from services
- Vehicle Usage policy and how the policy applies to drivers
- Inclement Weather Policy
- Media Contacts

Goal 7: The Division will revise and implement changes to the Financial Needs policy in order to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all individuals with disabilities who apply and are found eligible for services.

This goal was achieved via Program guide 99-12 that was put into effect on

October 1, 1999. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments allow State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies to identify services requiring a consideration of financial need and to develop policies which identify services for which individuals may be required to participate in the cost of their services. As a matter of state policy, the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) considers a financial need test for certain services identified in this policy. This program guide provides direction and policy when applying a financial need test for applicants/eligible consumers of the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Each eligible consumer of the vocational rehabilitation program requires documentation as to the financial need in the case service record. This financial need policy assures that the level of an individual's participation in the cost of vocational rehabilitation services is: reasonable, based on the individual's financial need, including consideration of any disability-related expenses paid by the individual; and not so high as to effectively deny the individual a necessary service.

Goal 8: The Division will implement strategies to expand services to individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities.

- ✓ SBVI has promoted the use of situational assessments that can be effective in determining interests and abilities of consumers with significant disabilities.
- ✓ SBVI has worked closely with the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Mental Health to ensure that consumers in need of supported employment have the long-term supports in place before the VR counselor fades out.
- ✓ SBVI has utilized private job development providers and consumer-certified providers in order to provide quality services in rural areas.

Goal 9: The Division will implement strategies to provide vocational rehabilitation services to Native Americans and other individuals of minority backgrounds with disabilities.

- ✓ Cooperative agreements with the Native American 121 projects in the state have been updated.
- ✓ SBVI staff make regular visits to 121 projects in their territories and have made improvements in the coordination of services and collaboration.
- ✓ The Division encourages participation from the 121 projects in SBVI staff training events.
- ✓ SBVI staff conduct and participate in outreach events on reservations throughout the state.

Goal 10: The Division will implement strategies so applicants/consumers will have more information on Vocational Rehabilitation and have greater access to their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

- ✓ The Division has developed a new informational brochure that provides readers with an uncomplicated view of the services that SBVI offers and the steps to take to apply for services.
- ✓ A VR counselor position was relocated to the central part of South Dakota in order to increase SBVI's presence in the central region. This has resulted in an increase in the number of applications in this region.
- ✓ The information packet for new applicants was revised in order to provide more information on informed choice and the VR process.

Goal 11: Based on recommendations provided as public input, the Division will place a priority on Transition Services and eliminate the inconsistencies in service delivery statewide as well as develop more timely services capacities.

- ✓ SBVI has provided guidance to staff on the appropriate services for transition age consumers.
- ✓ A contractual transition specialist works with counselors statewide and partners with the SD transition project staff to provide effective services to SBVI consumers.
- ✓ A renewed emphasis has been placed on the Summer Transition Program for SBVI consumers.
- ✓ SBVI consumers participate in the Youth Leadership Forum, which is an annual event designed to develop leadership and advocacy in the transition aged youth with disabilities.

State Unified Plan

The State Unified Plan requires partner agencies to describe actions that will be taken if performance falls short of expectations. The Rehabilitation Act provides remedies and plans for state agencies that do not achieve required performance standards. State Plan Attachment 4.11(e)(2) addresses Unified Plan requirements in their entirety. This attachment clearly demonstrates:

- ✓ The Division of SBVI's descriptions as to achievement of all goals and strategies described in the FFY 2000 to FFY 2007 State Plan attachments 4.12 (c)(1) and 4.12 (d).

- ✓ That SBVI exceeds all standards and indicators pursuant to performance standards in the Rehabilitation Act.
- ✓ There is an evaluation of progress implemented to improve the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program.

Performance outcomes of both vocational rehabilitation programs in South Dakota (general and blind) are summarized for and discussed with the Workforce Development Council in addition to the state rehabilitation councils (Board of SBVI and Board of Vocational Rehabilitation).

Utilization of Innovation and Expansion Funds – SBVI

The Rehabilitation Act requires that a portion of funds be reserved for innovation and expansion activities. The Division of SBVI works with the Board to prioritize these activities. The Board of SBVI utilizes the Division senior secretary for support of Board activities due to the limited resources available for personnel. Activities supported by the Board of SBVI in FY2007 were as follows:

- Costs associated w/ Board Member attendance at quarterly meetings;
- Public Meeting Promotion and Facilitation;
- Consumer Satisfaction Surveys;
- Stipends to Consumers to State Seminars and Conferences;
- Activities to conduct to the Statewide Needs Assessment;
- National Disability Employment Awareness Month Activities
- Workshop registration and travel expenses for Board Members attendance at agency training, RSA sponsored training and consumer conventions;
- Workshop registration and travel expenses for consumers' attendance at state conventions of consumer organizations.

Board members participate in prioritizing innovation and expansion activities which impact citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Board members provided guidance on questions and implementation of the consumer satisfaction surveys and the statewide needs assessments.